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Message Text

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12
ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 DRC-01 /138 W
---------- 018205
R 061621Z MAR 74 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHC 6788
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
USINT DAMASCUS
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

UNCLAS BEIRUT 2640

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, MOPS, XF, SY, IS, JO
SUBJECT: SYRIAN PRESIDENT SPEAKS OUT ON OCTOBER WAR

SUMMARY: SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFEZ AL ASSAD DISCUSSED OCTOBER WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH IN INTERVIEW WITH BEIRUT WEEKLY AS SAYYAD (MAR 6). INTERVIEW REPORTEDLY TOOK PLACE AFTER LATEST KISSINGER AND GROMYKO VISITS TO DAMASCUS. ASSAD CLAIMED INOPPORTUNE CEASEFIRE HAD ABORTED PROJECTED SYRIAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE, CONDEMNED KING HUSSEIN'S WARTIME REFUSAL TO OPEN THIRD FRONT, AND REITERATED HIS PHILOSOPHY RE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, STRESSING SYRIAN INDEPENDENCE. END SUMMARY.

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1. OCTOBER WAR SCENARIO: ASSAD SAID OCTOBER WAR BEGAN WITH

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2,500 SYRIAN TANKS MASSED ON 70 MILE FRONT; 1,200 WERE LOST (VS. 900 IDF TANKS DESTROYED) IN SWEEP CARRYING SYRIAN FORCES TO LAKE HULAH. HE HAD EXPECTED TO REACH HAIFA QUICKLY WHILE EGYPT CAPTTURED AL ARISH, BUT ISRAELI POWS REVEALED THAT IDF WAS EXPECTING ATTACK AND THUS REQUISITE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE HAD BEEN LOST. IN ADDITION TO REGAINING TERRITORY, ASSAD DECLARED MAJOR WAR OBJECTIVE WAS DESTRUCTION OF MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF IDF PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT. HE CLAIMED THAT DURING EARLY PHASE OF WAR IDF AND SYRIAN FORCES WERE EVENLY MATCHED, BUT "MASSIVE US RESUPPLY" TURNED RATIO TO AS MUCH AS FIFTEEN TO ONE AGAINST SYRIA. NEVERTHELESS, IDF WAS ON POINT OF COLLAPSE AND SYRIA WAS PREPARING COUNTER-OFFENSIVE WHEN "WE WERE SURPRISED" BY ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN CEASEFIRE, WHICH DEPRIVED SYRIA OF "GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY". ASSAD STRESSED THAT DESPITE THIS BLOW "INEVITABLE" UNITY BETWEEN SARG AND EGYPT IS STRONGER THAN THEIR "DIFFERING VIEWS" RE CEASEFIRE AND DISENGAGEMENT OF FORCES ON GOLAN HEIGHTS.

2. JORDANIAN ROLE: ASSAD DISAPPOINTED AT JORDANIAN FAILURE TO OPEN "THIRD FRONT". HE SAID: "I TRIED PERSUADE THOSE RESPONSIBLE IN AMMAN OF NEED TO OPEN THIRD FRONT.... I TOLD JORDANIAN DELEGATION IN DAMASCUS 'ROAD TO JERUSALEM IS OPEN. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?" ASSAD SAID HE PROVIDED KING HUSSEIN INFO GAINED FROM RADIO INTERCEPTS AND CAPTURED CODES SUGGESTING THAT IDF WAS UNABLE TO PROTECT JERUSALEM AND THAT DETERMINED JAA ATTACK COULD HAVE CAPTURED CITY. HE ADDED BITTERLY THAT JORDAN MERELY SENT TROOPS TO SYRIA, JUST TO"SAVE FACE".

3. SYRIAN VALOR: ASSAD EXTOLLED COMBAT HEROISM AND PERFORMANCE OF SYRIAN FORCES AT LENGTH--OBSERVING THAT "WITH ALL DUE RESPECT TO VALOR OF ARAB REINFORCEMENTS ON SYRIAN FRONT,...OUR ARMY ALONE CONTAINED ISRAELI PENETRATION" TOWARD DAMASCUS. HE CITED NUMBEROUS EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUAL HEROISM, INCLUDING SUICIDE ATTACKS BY SYRIAN HELICOPTERS. HE STRESSED THAT SAMS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT HAD NOT DEFEATED ISRAELI AIR FORCE, CREDIT FOR WHICH BELONGED TOSYRIAN PILOTS. ASSAD ADDED THAT SYRIA HAD BEEN PAYING CASH FOR ALL ARMS AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT, AND THATALL ARAB POST-WAR ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN SYMBOLIC EXCEPT FOR 100 MILLION DOLLAR UAE GRANT.

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4. PHILOSOPHY OF NEGOTIATION: SAYYAD PORTRAYED ASSAD AS NOT OPPOSED TO ME PEACE SETTLEMENT, BUT DESCRIBED HIS POSITION AS "NATURAL RESPONSE" TO LONG-STANDING NEGATIVE ISRAELI AND US POSTIIONS. ASSAD SAID HE TOLD SECRETARY KISSINGER: "FOR 26 YEARS, US HAS BEEN PROVIDING ISRAEL WITH WEAPONS TO KILL US AND DESTROY US, AS WELL AS TO DISPERSE OUR PALESTINIAN BROTHERS. AFTER ALL THIS, YOU WANT US TO FORGET ABOUT YOUR POLICY IN EXCHANGE FOR WORDS THAT ARE NOT ACCOMPANIED BY PRACTICAL DEEDS; WE DO NOT WANT WAR,

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AND WE WILL NOT HESITATE TO COOPERATE IN ESTABLISHING PERMANENT AND JUST PEACE, BUT DO NOT FORGET WE HAVE OUR INTEGRITY...AS WELL AS OUR DUTY TOWARDS OUR MARTYRS. THIS IS SOMETHING WE CANNOT ABANDON IN FACE OF ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE AND AMERICAN BIAS."

5. GENEVA CONFERENCE: ASSAD SAID THAT SOVIET UNION, THOUGH IT SUPPORTS RIGHTS OF SYRIA AND OTHER ARABS, IS STILL TRYING PERSUADE SYRIA TO GO TO GENEVA CONFERENCE. BUT SYRIA, HOWEVER EAGER IT MAY BE TO MAINTAIN SOIVET FRIENDSHIP, REFUSES TO GO WITHOUT SOME TANGIBLE ASSURANCE THAT ITS RIGHTS AND INTEGRITY "WILL BE GUARANTEED."

6. FULL ARABIC TEXT OF SAYYAD INTERVIEW AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.
GODLEY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WAR, ARMISTICE, PEACE PLANS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 MAR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BEIRUT02640
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740365/aaaacijl.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: martinml
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 JUL 2002 by elbezefj>; APPROVED <04 DEC 2002 by martinml>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYRIAN PRESIDENT SPEAKS OUT ON OCTOBER WAR SUMMARY: SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFEZ AL ASSAD DISCUSSED
TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, MOPS, XF, SY, IS, JO, (ASSAD, HAFEZ AL)
To: STATE DAMASCUS
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

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